

“Triangle of Death”



Lessons from Yusufiyah: Table of Contents

For all members of the Army Profession

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“Triangle of Death”

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1. Checklist

- ☐ Recruit additional strong/respected leaders from your unit to be facilitators with your unit. (Recruit as many as the situation mandates)
- ☐ Watch the video and read the transcript prior to your facilitation.
- ☐ Review the additional resources.
- ☐ Review the “How to run your workshop” guidelines prior to facilitating.
- ☐ Think about a personal experience that relates to the scenario.
- ☐ Resource Prep:
 - Make copies of the video transcripts and facilitation questions as needed for each of your facilitators.
 - If you plan on showing video clips, test to make sure they work on the system in your designated training area.
 - Make sure you have a whiteboard with dry-erase markers.

2. Who's Who



Jim Frederick is the author of *Black Hearts*.



John Diem was a Team Leader with 1st Platoon, Bravo Company.



Justin Watt was a Soldier with 1st Platoon, Bravo Company.

Travis Nelson was a Team Leader with 1st Platoon, Bravo Company, mentioned in this story. He was killed in action.



Eric Lauzier was a Squad Leader with 1st Platoon, Bravo Company.

Ken Casica was a Squad Leader with 1st Platoon, Bravo Company, mentioned in this story. He was killed in action.

3. Part I “Heavy Losses” Video Transcript: Jim Frederick describes conditions in the Triangle of Death



“In 2005 and 2006, it’s hard to remember now, but this was really the war was at its darkest hour. It was highly conceivable that by any definition America was going to lose this war.

The Triangle of Death is an area banded by three cities known as Yusufiyah, Latifiyah and Mahmudiyah, which was really the fault line of Sunni-Shiite Civil War. Due to its close proximity to Baghdad, it became a weigh station for sectarian and sergeant groups of all types ferrying men, money, (and) ammunition into and out of Baghdad. It really was the closest thing that the insurgents had to a staging base, to wage war on Baghdad. In late 2005, this particular brigade—the 502nd Infantry Regiment—was basically instructed to just go down there and save the day. We hadn’t really been paying attention to this, but things are going badly and so you need to fix this.

In the Triangle of Death itself was First Battalion’s area of operations. Within First Battalion’s area of operations was Bravo Company’s, which was the western edge of this Triangle of Death, which was by far the most dangerous region of the most dangerous region in Iraq. So this company was flung out there in basically the size of a

region that a battalion who came after them occupied after that.

They didn’t really have the equipment to do the job. They didn’t necessarily have the manning to do the job, and almost from day one they were in a hot war-zone. This particular unit, they received some sort of mortar or artillery fire every day—some sort of small-arms fire, RPG or rifles every other day. They encountered, or in the Soldier vernacular, got blown up by IEDs, 900 times in a year. That meant that they were hitting about three IEDs every single day.

Soldiers in this unit—in Bravo Company and especially in First Platoon—every single one of them has a story, not just of getting hit by IEDs, but getting hit by multiple IEDs in one day. Most of them have three or four IED-day days that they can tell stories about.

Now within 54 days, they had lost a platoon leader, their first sergeant, a team leader, a squad leader and several riflemen to either death or injury. Most of those to death, and most of them concentrated in First Platoon itself.

Travis Nelson and Ken Casica both got shot at point-blank range at a checkpoint by an Iraqi civilian—point blank by a civilian that they had thought was their friend because they had seen him in the region before.

4. Part I “Heavy Losses” Video Transcript (Continued)

Twelve days after that you have Ben Britt, who is the platoon leader who everybody acknowledges was really ... for platoon leaders because they're so young can go either way. They can either be fairly green and ineffectual or if they command the respect of the entire platoon, they can really be a pretty solid glue that keeps

everybody together. Ben Britt was that guy. He got hit by an IED in a canal bed and several of his men saw him get blown 50 feet into the air and he was dead. So First Platoon, within 50 to 90 days, is already seven or so men down to death and they are hurting badly.”

4. Part II “Heavy Losses” Video Transcript



Veterans from Bravo Company reflect on the losses and how they responded...

“It’s kind of like a real dad—they’re the person that goes through, like your big brother and basically teaches you all of the little idiosyncrasies of surviving in combat. ‘Now this is what det. cord looks like in the sun.’ ‘You only load 28 rounds in your magazine.’ You know little stuff like that,

you don’t think of that—28 rounds instead of 30 so your weapon doesn’t jam. All of the dumb stuff—you need a green or a blue head lamp because it’s hard to see blood in red, so if you’re working on a casualty in the dark. (These were) guys that teach you that stuff. (Ken) Casica was a guy like that because Casica had been there before; he had been wounded. He had a lot of useful skills like how to speak to the locals, how to interact with them.

When a guy like that dies, it just really, really hurts.”



“This entire platoon was already dealing with and struggling with the concept of, ‘Is this kinetic war-fighting? Are we

killing bad guys? Are we propping up and lifting the Iraqi society?’ Ken Casica who is the one guy who said, ‘We are here to help them. We are here to help build up Iraqi

society and help them stand up on (their) own.’

He was the one who was most friendly with this particular Iraqi civilian who from his waistband, one day, completely unprovoked, pulled a revolver out of his waistband and shot both this squad leader and this team leader—two of the most beloved men in the platoon at point-blank range.”



“When Sergeant Nelson and Casica died, I think that’s really what changed that tour for everybody. At the time, nobody had any

intent of actually pursuing COIN warfare except for those two. Nobody had really even heard about that concept and that name. It was just like hearts and minds.”

“We didn’t really understand the kind of conflict that we were involved in. So when those two died, it became like the dark-side of the center for Army lessons learned. You see a TTP that obviously doesn’t work, and then you just don’t do it again. It felt like, ‘Well if that many people are dying, then obviously COIN isn’t the way to go.’”

4. Part II “Soldiers’ Reactions” Video Transcript (continued)



“Kindness is weakness, and that’s how they see that. Casica, great guy—not a mean bone in that dude’s body—

but he wanted to help the Iraqis, and he was nice with them. The guy that shot him and Nelson, he’s talked to the guy before several times. The guy comes into the perimeter and what happens? You’ve got an area where the enemy activity is hot and you’re getting engaged all of the time—yeah, you need to be aggressive! You can’t trust anybody. You can’t trust anybody at all.”

“It’s like when you have a TCP for instance, and this would happen all of the time. A car comes up. A car comes into the

perimeter of the TCP, but you didn’t wave that car through. Well, when your perimeter has been breached, you’ve already lost; you’re done. The enemy has the initiative. So, yeah, you’ve got to search that car, pull that guy out. Yeah, he’s going to get a thumping because he’s going to learn not to come in. I am the sheriff of this little area. You don’t do it unless I say to do it. So, you know, a little thump and sit out in the sun.”

“My goal when I was over there was not to help the populous. I wanted to kill the enemy. I am going to kill the enemy. That’s what I am there for. The local populous, you guys want to help them out? That’s fine; I don’t care. My mission is to take out the enemy.”



“They’re testing you all of the time. ‘Can they drive up to the wire quickly without catching a shot?’ How many people are on?



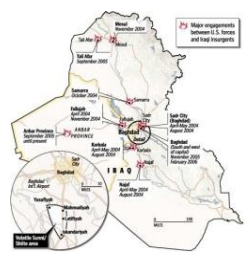
How close can they get? How far can they push those rules? How far can they walk up on you before you get serious? We’re never going to let that happen. They’re going to

know if they go on our side of the wire that we own that wire. That’s the way that we ran our squad.

We took a lot of fire. We took a lot of enemy contact because of it because we were overtly hostile sometimes. At the same time, no one tried to pull that stuff. That’s a tribute to exactly what Lauzier said. I think that’s the day that I decided I am going to play by Lauzier’s rules.

5. Additional Resources

The following resources are available:

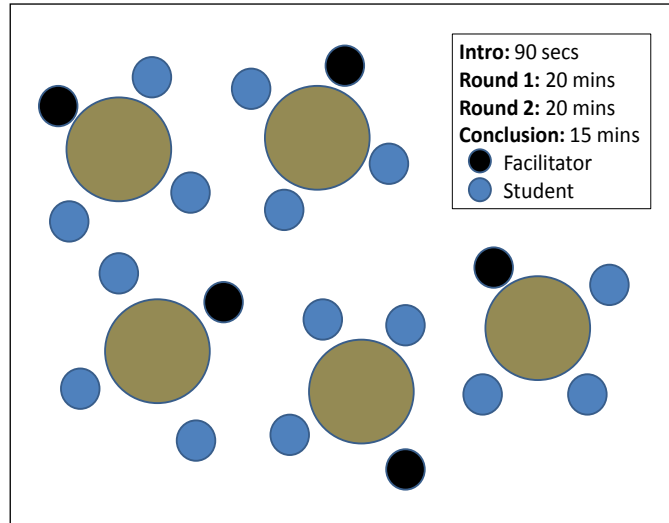
	<p><u>A Beast in the Heart of Every Fighting Man</u> By Luke Mogelson The case against American soldiers accused of murdering Afghan civilians turns on the idea of a rogue unit. But what if the killings are a symptom of a deeper problem?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/magazine/mag-01KillTeam-t.html?_r=1&emc=eta1
	<p><u>Documenting an Army platoon's decent into madness</u> By Emily Ruane, and Jim Frederick (<i>Time</i> Executive Editor) Jim Frederick discusses Black Hearts in an interview with VBS.TV.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/10/19/vbs.jim.frederick/index.html?iref=allsearch
	<p><u>Map of the Triangle of Death</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• http://bit.ly/JrMzCW

6. How to run your workshop

The basic concept provided below is a way to facilitate this module. Modify as necessary to fit the needs and demographics of the group. We find that having a variety of ranks/leadership positions in each group increases perspective and maximizes takeaway.

PREP: Have a whiteboard and markers available. Bring copies of the video transcripts. Have a Facilitator Guide available for each facilitator. Get there early and set up the room in huddles large enough to support a variety of leadership at each table. Put chairs around one table (keep people close), rather than pulling several tables together.

BASIC CONCEPT: Meet for 55 minutes to discuss the module. The group breaks down into huddles large enough to support a variety of leadership at each table. For example, you want to have SLs, PSGs, PLs, and CDRs in the same huddle so you can maximize the overall effectiveness and increase the number of vantage points. Have one facilitator at each table to guide (NOT LEAD) the discussion. The workshop begins with facilitators asking the participants what their response was to the module. The facilitators' main role is to be a catalyst for conversation and learning about the topic at hand. This module includes three rounds of discussion, with participants digging deeper each round and ends with personal stories and vignettes that relate to the module.



KEYS TO SUCCESS:

- Let participants do most of the talking.
- The facilitators' key role is to ask questions that spark thought and conversation.
- Ensure you engage each level of leadership and everyone within your group. Do not let any one person dominate the conversation.
- Have questions prepped for each round to drive the conversation. (See "Detailed Plan" on page 7)
- You are a catalyst for conversation. Make sure that you continue to ask questions that make your group dig deeper.

7. Detailed plan for your workshop

INTRODUCTION (90 seconds)

Introduce the Workshop in a way that communicates the purpose of the event.

"Today we're going to look at a real world example of a unit experiencing heavy casualties, and discuss how we, as leaders, will respond or have responded to similar situations."

ROUND 1 - (20 minutes): Immediate Situation

[Watch "Triangle of Death: Heavy Losses"]

1. Jim Frederick describes the scenario as, "the war's darkest hour." He says the company was located in, "by far the most dangerous region of the most dangerous region in Iraq (Triangle of Death.)" How do environmental factors affect a unit's ability to perform?
2. Jim Frederick says the company didn't have the equipment or the manning to do the job. A) Was this company set-up for success? Why or why not? B) How do the realities of combat change how we view a company as, "properly equipped?" How do these realities change our measures of success?
3. Bravo Company suffered many injuries and casualties, especially in First Platoon. What psychological, emotional and physical effect would this have on the Soldiers?
4. Given the OPTEMPO and environmental considerations, what measures would you take as a leader to safeguard the morale and mental health of your unit?
5. If you were a leader in this company, how would you A) Address your Soldiers regarding the heavy losses that you were experiencing? B) Address your higher command about the heavy losses that you were experiencing? C) Maintain a positive command climate within your unit?

ROUND 2 - (20 minutes): Soldier's Reactions.

[Watch "Triangle of Death: Soldiers' Reactions"]

1. SSG Diem says, "We didn't really understand the kind of conflict that we were involved in." A) What impact do you think that had on the mission? B) How does a proper understanding of the mission or the conflict help Soldiers perform their duty? C) How do you as a leader ensure that Soldiers at the lowest level have a clear understanding of the mission?
2. Lauzier says, "Kindness is weakness, and that's how they see that." Do you agree or disagree? Why?
3. Lauzier says, "You can't trust anybody. You can't trust anybody at all." A) To whom is Lauzier specifically referring? B) Is there truth to this statement? Explain. C) What are the risks of this attitude?
4. Watt ends the video with the comment, "I think that's the day that I decided I am going to play by Lauzier's rules." A) As a leader, and given the circumstances, how do you maintain discipline within your unit? B) How is this a reflection on your command climate? C) What measures would you or do you have in place to ensure Soldiers are adhering to the Army Values and are maintaining their professionalism?
5. Picture yourself as a leader in this unit. A) How would you influence or address Lauzier if he was your peer? B) How would you influence or address Lauzier if he was your subordinate? C) How would you work to build the resiliency of your Soldiers? D) What steps would you take to restore confidence, morale and a positive command climate within the unit?

7. Detailed plan for your workshop (continued)

ROUND 3 - Conclusion (15 minutes): Personal Vignettes and takeaways.

Facilitator asks students to share any personal vignettes and takeaways from the module.

It is important for the group to relate to this story on a personal level. Conclude the module emphasizing the importance of trust and esprit de corps. Leaders should walk away better equipped to handle similar situations, and confident in their unit's ability to maintain effectiveness in the midst of heavy combat.

Upon concluding, the following questions are useful for determining learning and promoting reflection:

Learning	Q - What did you learn from listening to the reactions and reflections of other leaders? Q - What are the future implications of this decision and or experience?
Reflection	Q - How do you feel/what do you think about what you learned? Q - What will you do with your new information? Q – How can you integrate new learning into your Command team philosophy, command structure and climate?